

*August 5, 2015*



# Team

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# Overview

- ❑ **How does media coverage affect suicides?**
- ❑ **What guidelines exist to help media outlets?**
- ❑ **What are media outlets currently doing?**
  - Volpe center research effort
- ❑ **What can railroads do?**
- ❑ **Where do we go from here?**

# How does media coverage affect suicides?

- ❑ Widespread coverage of suicide in the media has been linked to copycat suicides
  - **Werther Effect:** A subsequent rise in imitative, or copycat, suicides following a widely publicized suicide.<sup>1,2</sup>
- ❑ Examples in Europe, particularly Austria and Germany have shown that when news reports appeared about railway suicides, the number of deaths by railway suicides increased dramatically.<sup>3</sup>

1. Kim J-H, Park E-C, Nam J-M, Park S, Cho J, Kim S-J, et al. (2013) The Werther Effect of Two Celebrity Suicides: an Entertainer and a Politician.

2. Phillips D P: The influence of suggestion on suicide: substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect.

3. Ladwig, K. H., Kunrath, S., Lukaschek, K., & Baumert, J. (2012).

# What guidelines exist to help media outlets?

- ❑ Different guidelines available internationally

US Based Organizations	Link to guidelines
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)	<a href="https://www.afsp.org/news-events/for-the-media/reporting-on-suicide">https://www.afsp.org/news-events/for-the-media/reporting-on-suicide</a>
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)	<a href="http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/recommendations-for-reporting-on-suicide.shtml">www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/recommendations-for-reporting-on-suicide.shtml</a>
Suicide Prevention Research Center (SPRC)	<a href="http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/sreporting.pdf">http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/sreporting.pdf</a>
International Organizations	Link to guidelines
Mindframe - <i>Australia</i>	<a href="http://www.mindframe-media.info/">http://www.mindframe-media.info/</a>
Samaritans - <i>UK</i>	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/press/10%20things%20to%20remember%20when%20reporting%20suicide.pdf">http://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/press/10%20things%20to%20remember%20when%20reporting%20suicide.pdf</a>
World Health Organization (WHO)	<a href="http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf">http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf</a>

**Note: ALL guidelines are voluntary.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

Source: *International Association of Suicide Prevention, Australian Association of Suicide Prevention, American Association of Suicide Prevention, Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention, European Association of Suicide Prevention, Japanese Association of Suicide Prevention, Korean Association of Suicide Prevention, Mexican Association of Suicide Prevention, New Zealand Association of Suicide Prevention, Norwegian Association of Suicide Prevention, Polish Association of Suicide Prevention, Portuguese Association of Suicide Prevention, Romanian Association of Suicide Prevention, Russian Association of Suicide Prevention, Spanish Association of Suicide Prevention, Swedish Association of Suicide Prevention, Swiss Association of Suicide Prevention, Taiwanese Association of Suicide Prevention, Thai Association of Suicide Prevention, Turkish Association of Suicide Prevention, Vietnamese Association of Suicide Prevention, Welsh Association of Suicide Prevention, and the United Kingdom Association of Suicide Prevention.*

### IMPORTANT POINTS FOR COVERING SUICIDE

- More than 50 research studies worldwide have found that certain types of media coverage can increase the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration and prominence of coverage.
- Risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death.
- Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.

Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However, the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion or positively by encouraging help-seeking.

References and additional information can be found at: [www.ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://www.ReportingOnSuicide.org).

Suicide Contagion or "Copycat Suicide" occurs when one or more suicides are reported in a way that contributes to another suicide.

#### INSTEAD OF THIS:

- Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").
- Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials or funerals.
- Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing" or other strong terms.
- Describing a suicide as inexplicable or "without warning."
- "John Doe left a suicide note saying..."
- Investigating and reporting on suicide similar to reporting on crimes.
- Quoting/interviewing police or first responders about the causes of suicide.
- Referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt."

#### DO THIS:

- Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Died at 27").
- Use school/work or family photos; include hotline logs or local crisis phone numbers.
- Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use non-sensational words like "free" or "higher."
- Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the "Warning Signs" and "What to Do" sidebar (from p. 2) in your article if possible.
- "A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner."
- Report on suicide as a public health issue.
- Seek advice from suicide prevention experts.
- Describe as "died by suicide" or "completed" or "killed himself."

## TEN THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN REPORTING SUICIDE

- Leave out technical details about the method of suicide, such as describing the type of ligature used or the number and types of pills taken in an overdose. Never suggest that a method is quick, easy, painless or certain to result in death.
- Language matters. Avoid dramatic headlines and terms such as 'suicide epidemic' or 'hot spot'.
- Include references to support groups and places where suicidal people can find help – it really does make a difference.
- Treat social media with particular caution and refrain from mentioning websites or networks that promote or glamorize suicide.
- Avoid dramatic or sensationalist pictures or videos. Refrain from including content from suicide notes.
- Young people are especially vulnerable to negative suicide coverage. Do not give undue prominence to photographs of a young person who has died and avoid repeated use of images such as galleries.
- Try not to give a story undue prominence, for example with a front cover splash.
- Don't brush over the complex realities of suicide and its impact on those left behind. Remember that people bereaved by suicide are often vulnerable and are more likely to take their own lives than the general population.
- Speculation about the 'trigger' for a suicide – even if from close family members – should be avoided.
- Use statistics with caution. Check with Samaritans or the relevant national statistical agency to make sure you have the most recent data and are comparing like with like.

Summary

Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide

### Recommendations for any story about suicide

#### Minimise details about method and location

Studies have shown that explicit or technical descriptions and images of methods<sup>18</sup> or locations<sup>19</sup> used for suicide have been linked to increased rates of suicide. Some recommendations are provided below.

Issue	Options to Consider
Reporting explicit detail about method has been linked to increases in both use of that method and overall suicide rates. <sup>18</sup>	➔ If it is important to mention the method, discuss in general terms only, e.g. use 'cocktail of drugs' instead of detailing the type and quantity of medications taken.
Reporting uncommon or new methods of suicide can lead to imitation as well as a lasting impact on rates. <sup>18</sup>	➔ Remove specific details about new or unusual methods of suicide and references to ways further information can be obtained about these methods, e.g. online.
Describing locations of suicide may promote these to vulnerable people and increase the frequency of attempts at these sites. <sup>19</sup>	➔ If it is important to refer to a location, describe this in general terms only, e.g. use 'at a nearby park' instead of detailing the exact location. In advocacy stories (e.g. around safety at a specific site) limit the number of times the location is described in detail or mentioned in each report.
Images or footage that depicts the method or location of a suicide can lead to imitation by vulnerable people. <sup>18</sup>	➔ Avoid the use of detailed or dramatic photographs or footage, e.g. images of people standing on ledges or of implements used in a suicide attempt.



# Guidelines for responsible reporting

References and additional information can be found at: [www.ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://www.ReportingOnSuicide.org).

## INSTEAD OF THIS:



- Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide").
- Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials or funerals.
- Describing recent suicides as an "epidemic," "skyrocketing," or other strong terms.
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## DO THIS:



- Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., "Kurt Cobain Dead at 27").
- Use school/work or family photo; include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.
- Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use non-sensational words like "rise" or "higher."
- Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the "Warning Signs" and "What to Do" sidebar (from p. 2) in your article if possible.
- "A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner."
- Report on suicide as a public health issue.
- Seek advice from suicide prevention experts.
- Describe as "died by suicide" or "completed" or "killed him/herself."

# Volpe Center Research Effort

**Reviewed current media coverage, focused on 4 guidelines:**

1. Use of the word “suicide” in the headline
2. Use of images or video that depict the method or location of a suicide
3. Ensure death is not reported as a suicide until it has been confirmed as a suicide by official sources
4. Promote help-seeking



# Methodology

**Objective:** Collect and analyze one years' worth of media reports describing pedestrian trespass/suicide rail related incidents in the US. (Sep 2013 – Aug 2014)



<input type="checkbox"/> ☆	Google Alerts	Google Alert - struck by train - Google struck by train Daily update · July 15, 2015 NEWS Chicago Tribune Man on bike dies after being	12:04 pm
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆	Google Alerts	Google Alert - train accident - Google train accident Daily update · July 15, 2015 NEWS Person Killed in Train Accident in Old Town	12:04 pm
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆	Google Alerts	Google Alert - train and suicide - Google train and suicide Daily update · July 15, 2015 NEWS CBS Local Death of North Wales woman hit	12:01 pm
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆	Google Alerts	Google Alert - train death - Google train death Daily update · July 15, 2015 NEWS CBS Local Death of North Wales woman hit by	12:00 pm
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆	Google Alerts	Google Alert - train accident - Google train accident Daily update · July 14, 2015 NEWS WJXT Jacksonville Local mother killed after	Jul 14

# Data Overview

**Timeframe: September 2013- August 2014 (12 months)**

*Number of unique FRA incidents that had at least one media report: **658***

*Total number of media articles gathered: **1179***

FRA	# of Incidents	# of Matched Media Articles	% of Matched Media Articles
Trespass Casualties	894	503	56%
Suicide Casualties	239	155	65%
<b>TOTAL Casualties</b>	<b>1133</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>58%</b>

Note: 723 of the total FRA trespass and suicide casualties were fatalities and 410 were injuries.

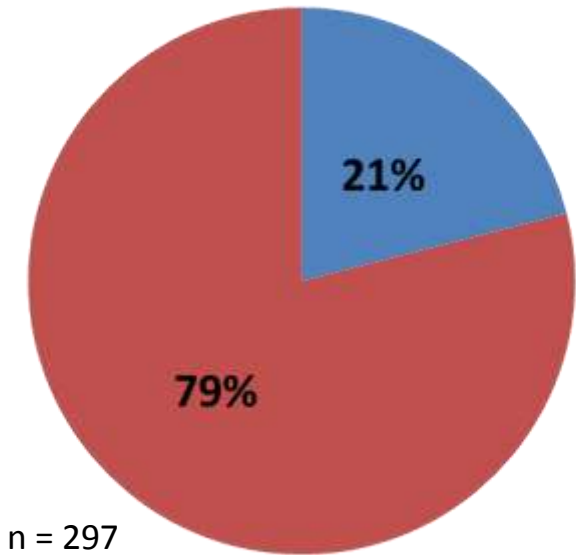
# Sample Size

Timeframe: September 2013- August 2014 (12 months)

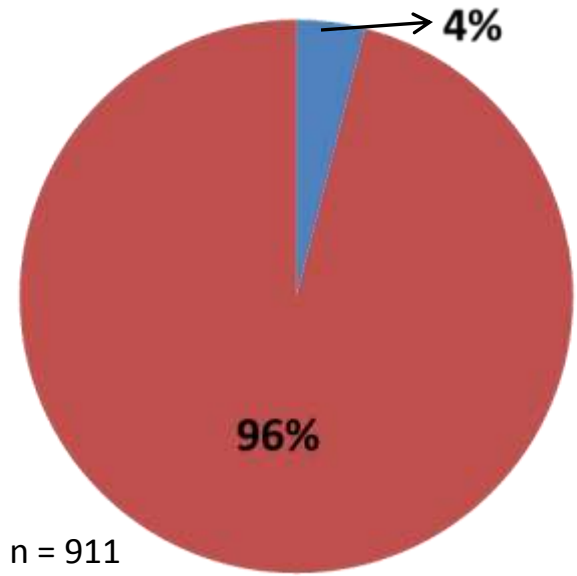
- Of 155 unique suicide incidents 297 media reports were collected
- Of 503 unique trespass incidents 911 media reports were collected

# “Suicide” in the Headline

Media Articles of FRA  
Reported **Suicide** Casualties



Media Articles of FRA  
Reported **Trespass** Casualties



- "suicide" in the headline
- Does not Include "suicide" in the headline

# Examples of “Suicide” in the Headline

## **Pedestrian Hit, Killed By ACE Train In Pleasanton In Apparent Suicide**

May 31, 2014 8:00 AM

## **Decatur Police: Man Stepped In Front of Train Intentionally**

POSTED 8:00 AM, MARCH 3, 2014, BY WENTON BLUMBERG, UPDATED 4:09 PM, MARCH 3, 2014

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## **Edmonds ferry service resumes after deadly train accident**

By KOMO Staff | Published: Nov 15, 2013 at 9:09 AM PDT | Last Updated: Nov 15, 2013 at 1:12 PM PDT

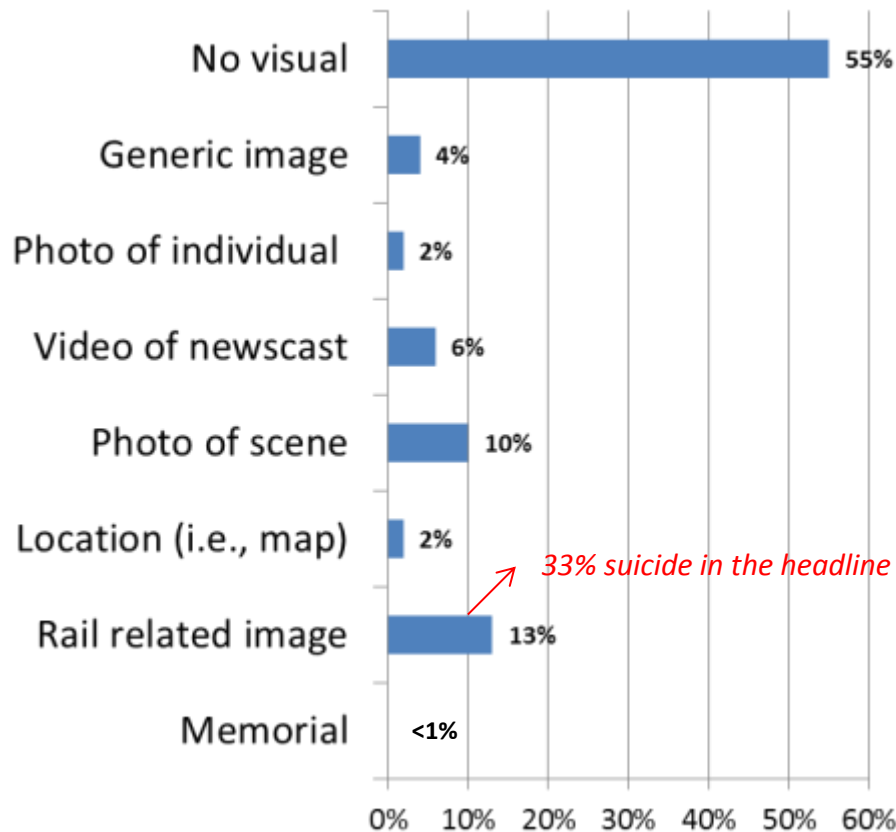
## **Early Morning Train Accident Leaves One Dead**

Posted: Jul 08, 2014 11:21 AM EDT

Updated: Jul 14, 2014 6:48 PM EDT

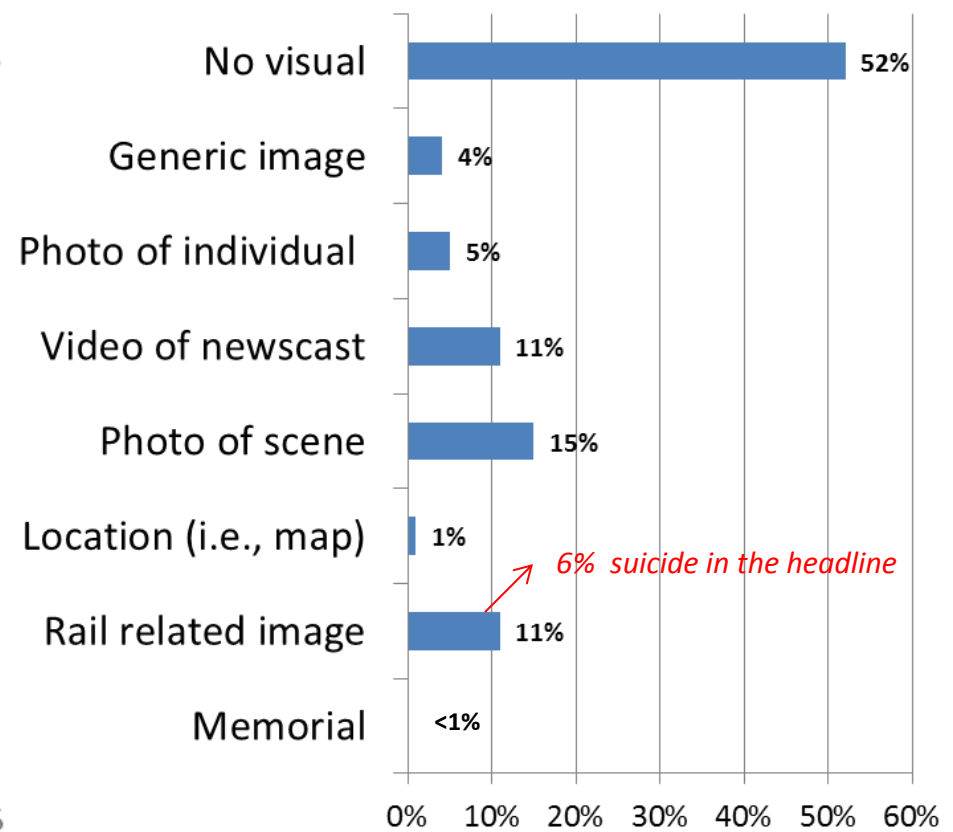
# Images in Report

Media reports of FRA reported suicide casualties



n=297

Media reports of FRA reported trespass casualties



n=911



# Examples of images in reports`



March 27, 2014 | 1070 views

NEWS

## Suicide at Lynbrook LIRR train station

Man jumps in front of eastbound train

By Mary Malloy

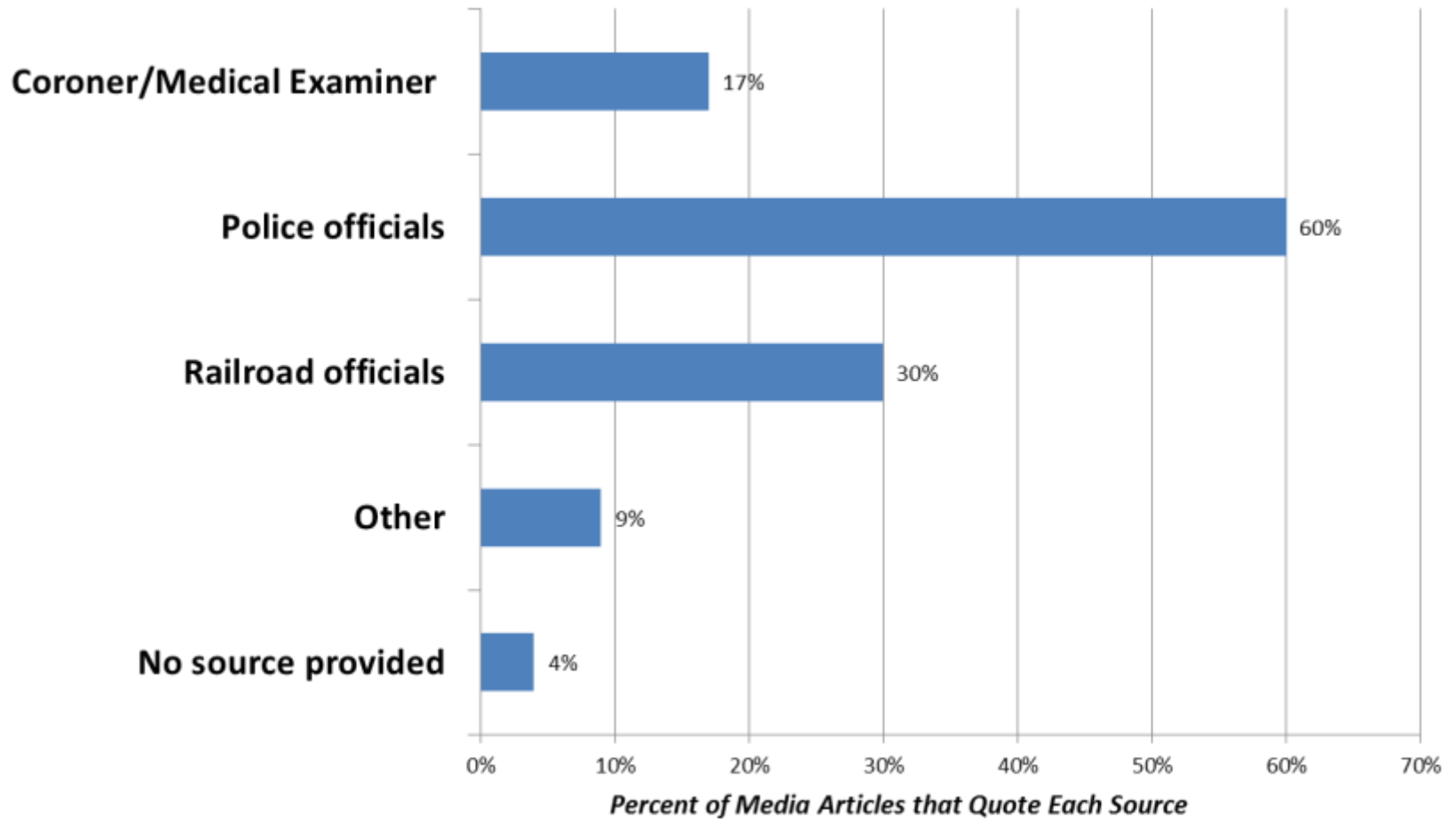


A 30-year-old Valley Stream man took his own life on Mar. 21 when he jumped in front of an eastbound Long Island Rail Road train as it was pulling into the Lynbrook station.

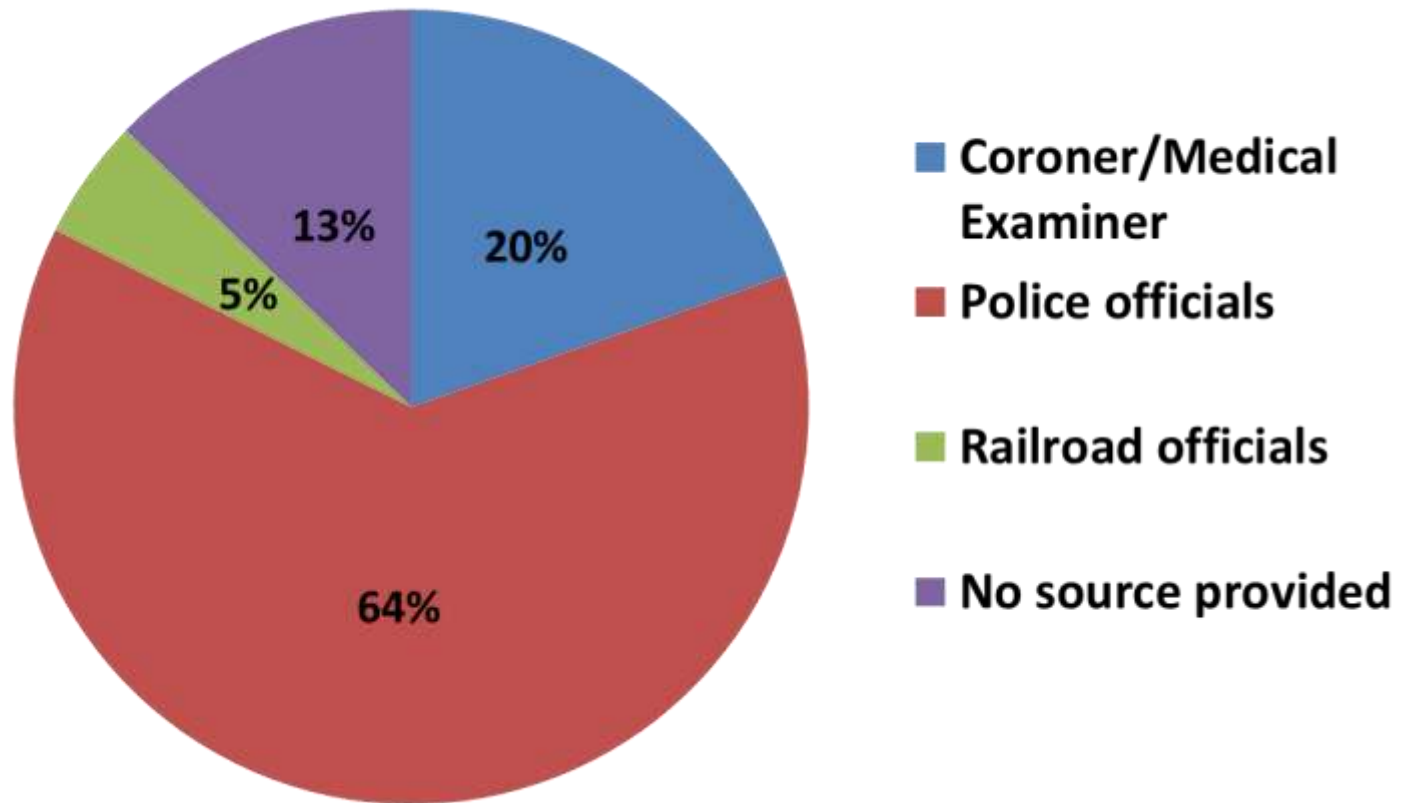
According to Metropolitan Transportation Authority spokeswoman Meredith Daniels, police were notified by a railroad employee that the 7:41 p.m. train from Penn Station to Beach 116th Street struck the man at approximately 7:45 p.m. when he leapt in front of the train as it was pulling into the station.



# Who is the media quoting?



# Officials noting suicide as cause of death



n= 102 articles that reported cause of death

# Reports that promote help seeking

- 2 out of 297 of the FRA reported suicides media reports promoted help seeking information. 102 out of 297 covered the incident as a suicide

- San Diego County Crisis Line: 1-888-724-7240
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

## Suicide suspected in Encinitas train-tracks death

Story Comments

Print Font Size: - +

Recommend 0 Tweet 0 +1 0 Share 0

Posted: Saturday, August 9, 2014 11:39 am

City News Service

A man who witnesses said was sitting on the train tracks in Encinitas was killed early Saturday when he was hit by a freight train.

The apparent suicide occurred about 1:48 a.m. Saturday on the combined passenger-freight tracks at the 900 block of South Coast Highway, Deputy Anthony Radicia said.

Witnesses said they saw a man sitting on the west rail of track number two holding his head in his hands and looking downward, Radicia said.

The northbound Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight train activated its horn and emergency brakes but was unable to stop before hitting and killing the man, Radicia said.

The 40-year-old man was pronounced dead at the scene. His name was not immediately released.

On Thursday, a 22-year-old man was [killed in Carlsbad by a freight train](#) while trying to cross the tracks. His death was believed to be an accident.

The following 24-hour hotlines are available for suicide prevention:

- San Diego County Crisis Line: 1-888-724-7240
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

# What can railroads do?

- ☐ Encourage local media to use guidelines/ remind them of the guidelines
- ☐ Develop a systematic approach for what information to provide to the media and how to frame it
- ☐ Avoid speculating about cause of death or specific details about the incident

# Where do we go from here?

- ❑ Development of railroad specific media guidelines
  - Figure out ways to improve and disseminate to the media
- ❑ Look at impact of social media



## Recommendations for any story about suicide

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Issue ?	Options to Consider ?
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Describing locations of suicide may promote these to vulnerable people and increase the frequency of attempts at these sites. <sup>47</sup>	➔ If it is important to refer to a location, describe this in general terms only, e.g. use 'at a nearby park' instead of detailing the exact location. In advocacy stories (e.g. around safety at a specific site) limit the number of times the location is described in detail or mentioned in each report.
Images or footage that depicts the method or location of a suicide can lead to imitation by vulnerable people. <sup>48</sup>	➔ Avoid the use of detailed or dramatic photographs or footage, e.g. images of people standing on ledges or of implements used in a suicide attempt.



# THANK YOU!

**Bianka Mejia**

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